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**BLACKSTONE VALLEY HERITAGE EVENT TO RECEIVE  
GRANT FOR \$120,000 FROM FIRST LADY LAURA BUSH**

In a ceremony this morning in Washington, DC, First Lady Laura Bush will present a check for \$120,000 from the Preserve America program to Ted Sanderson, Executive Director of the Rhode Island Historical and Heritage Preservation Commission and Robert Billington, President of the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council to support the *Blackstone Valley Footsteps in History Preserve America Weekend* in 2006. Sanderson and Billington are both Commissioners with the Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor. The grant from Preserve America will make it possible to expand *Footsteps in History* from its beginnings last fall as a three-day event to a network of heritage tourism sites working together to draw thousands of visitors to multiple events and attractions in the Blackstone Valley.

In October of 2005, the Blackstone River Valley launched the largest arts, culture and heritage event in the Valley's history, *Blackstone Valley Footsteps in History Weekend*. This new event provided the opportunity for the public to experience 150 historic sites throughout the Blackstone River Valley. Over 4,000 people participated in 2005. Building on that success, the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, the Massachusetts Historical Commission, the

Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, and the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor collaborated on a grant application to the White House Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's Preserve America program to expand the *Footsteps in History* program.

According to Sanderson, the Blackstone Valley has never been better positioned to welcome visitors. "The recognition from the White House and Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton certainly helps our efforts to reauthorize the Blackstone National Heritage Corridor Commission, which is due to terminate in November of this year," added Sanderson.

Billington noted that *Footsteps in History* was created to invite visitors to discover the rich culture, arts and history of the Blackstone Valley. "Last year we had a one-weekend event, this year we will still offer a Columbus weekend event but will also explore the possibility of 24 events in our 24-town Corridor. With the help from the White House Preserve America grant we will be able to achieve our sustainable tourism development goals for the Blackstone Valley," Billington noted.

Larry Gall, Acting Executive Director of the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission, noted that the Blackstone Valley Tourism Collaborative, which is funded by the Corridor Commission, the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce Visitors Bureau and the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, launched the *Footsteps in History* concept in February of last year. "We all knew it was a good idea, and that the heritage of the Blackstone Valley is what the National Park Service is here to protect and what we have been working to do over the last 20 years," said Gall. "I don't think anybody thought the event would draw this type of attention. It confirms what we have been saying all along: that the Blackstone Valley is a special place in America and deserves to tell its American Story on a wider stage."

Director of the Massachusetts Historical Commission, Brona Simon said "if it were not for this partnership with the tourism groups and the National Heritage Corridor, this important region of Massachusetts would have a difficult time telling its story to the public. This is wonderful news

from the White House. It speaks well of the preservation work and tourism efforts going on in the Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor.”

Veronica Cadoppi, now a tourism planner for the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, was brought in June 2005 to help the Corridor launch *Footsteps in History*. “The Blackstone Valley is full of thousands of wonderful historical, cultural and artistic sites and attractions. We could only help 150 of them last year,” she said, “This year, with the Preserve America grant, we will be able to help even more places tell their exciting story to even more visitors. The Blackstone Valley is taking its place as a great American destination to discover.”

The White House funds will be matched with funds from the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce, and other non-governmental funds. The Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor will provide funding for training of site managers and volunteers.

Preserve America is a White House initiative in cooperation with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation; the U.S. departments of Defense, Interior, Agriculture, Commerce, Housing and Urban Development, Transportation, and Education; the National Endowment for the Humanities; the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities; and the President's Council on Environmental Quality.

Designated by Congress in 1986, the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor is composed of 24 cities and towns on 454 square miles of land in the watershed of the Blackstone River. The corridor area extends from north of Worcester, Massachusetts south to Providence, Rhode Island following the 46-mile long Blackstone River.

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